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ABSTRACT

Changing concepts of elementary education led educators in Sheffield, England, to rethink their facility needs. A move to open plan schools was the result. Problems encountered in this move differed according to whether the new facilities were replacements for previously existing structures, remodelled buildings, or brand new schools serving new populations. In each case problems involved the changing roles of head teachers, assistant teachers, and parents. Unanticipated problems included additional teacher workload, necessary duplication of materials, lack of nonprofessional assistance, inadequate storage, unexpected construction costs, and demands for learning resource centers. This document concludes with recommendations for the planning of future moves to open plan schools. (Author/PGD)

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Management Analysis Paper

OPEN PLAN EDUCATION

SHEFFIELD - ENGLAND

This document was prepared by the English team attending the INTEC training course on The Management of Change: Elementary Education, to be held at the Ullensvang Hotel in Lofthus, Norway, from 5th - 16th May, 1974.

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OPEN PLAN EDUCATION

SHEFFIELD - ENGLAND

I BACKGROUND

Open plan schools are a natural development in building design consequent upon changes in educational thought which have moved the emphasis from teaching to learning and produced an entirely different approach to learning and a different way of life from that which had been generally accepted for primary schools. The abolition of selection examinations for entrance to secondary schools consequent upon reorganisation and the establishment of comprehensive schools has served to accelerate the process of change in primary schools.

In Sheffield primary schools are defined as covering the 5 - 12 age group in a variety of ways:-

(a) Infant Schools 5 - 7

(b) First Schools 5 - 8

(c) Junior Schools 7 - 11

(d) Junior and Infant Schools 5 - 11

(e) Middle Schools 8 - 12

(f) First and Middle Schools 5 - 12

The wide variety at present, is the result of a reorganisation plan aimed to produce ultimately three types of school - First, Middle, First and Middle (the last being governed by the prevailing circumstances in a particular area e.g. number of children, etc).

Teachers and other educators have for years attempted to put this new approach to primary education into practice in most unhelpful buildings. The old schools are in fact being used by teachers in quite different ways from those for which they were designed - every bit of available space, entrance hall, cloakroom, corridor is put to use in an attempt to find the variety of space demanded by the wide range of activities which go on.

The conventional rigid classroom-corridor structure cannot cope efficiently with a philosophy which recognises that all children are individuals who learn and mature at different rates and in different ways and who must learn to live as members of a community and that the whole school building and the immediate surroundings are the learning environment.

Very probably, one of the most important influences on the change in school design is the different relationship which now exists between teachers and teachers (amongst whom there is a greater desire to share experiences, to pool knowledge and to work together), teachers and children (with whom the relationships resemble closely those of a good home) and between children and children. Children learn not only from the teacher but from each other. Teachers equally learn from each other and can contribute far more to the overall development of children if they work in an open situation where communication can be easily and readily established, not limited by the isolation of the classroom.

At the primary stage of education in particular, distinctions between subjects in the curriculum are becoming of less and less importance. Integration of subjects may make the education process more meaningful and more relevant to the child's needs and interests. The variety of provision, of opportunity, of activity for which schools need to be designed make the enclosed classroom an anachronism. Education is a personal process and we are designing for a breadth of inter-connected activities unrecognised in the past.

The problem then was to design a school which could cater for these changing patterns in education and to maintain an orderly structure in organisation of activity and space. Richness and variety of work demand richness and variety of environment - the kinds of spaces to be provided are all-important.

(a) 'Home bases' which belong to groups of children to achieve the security which all children need - a place to which they can go in the knowledge that there is a person who knows and understands them and is ready to guide and help them.

(b) Small enclosed areas where children can be quiet, undisturbed by surrounding noises or where they can be involved in a noisy activity e.g. music making without disturbing others.

(c) Larger general work areas relatively uncommitted but providing a variety of opportunities for development.

(d) Committed general work areas crafts, science, home economics.

(e) Covered outdoor areas, courts and general connection with a varied outside environment.

(f) Enclosed areas for music, foreign language teaching and the general use of audio-visual aids.

(g) A forum for movement education, drama, dance and for community use.

(h) A dining area designed for use also as teaching space.

At the instigation of the Chief Education Officer a 'Long Term Primary Planning Group' was formed to investigate the problem and to formulate proposals for its solution. The group was composed of the Senior A.E.O. for Primary Education, the Building Development Officer, two Advisers in Primary Education, two Head Teachers and two architects of the City Architect's Department who had been involved in school buildings for a number of years. This group met frequently to discuss all aspects of the problem and received evidence too from other Head Teachers and from Specialist Advisers in various academic fields.

At the same period a working group of Head Teachers and Advisers had a long series of discussions based on the Plowden report and its implementation. The group produced its findings in a paper entitled "The Organisation and Development of the Primary School".

Independently the local Head Teachers' Association had working parties studying developments in Primary education.

In addition to the wide range of professional opinion available locally, visits were made to other Education authorities and discussions took place with H.M.I.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits from these discussions was that architects established relationships with teachers and advisers, that architects were not only involved in discussion of education but that they visited schools specifically to see children and teachers at work. They were therefore able, with direct knowledge of what people wanted to be and to do in a new building, to bring their expertise to bear to stimulate what was already happening in education.

The Planning Group still exists and is involved in the briefs for new schools - education advisers are concerned in all discussions about the building of new schools and the remodelling of existing schools. Head Teachers have a vital role to play and are able to effect modifications to buildings to suit their own individual philosophy always provided that alterations do not run counter to the general education policy of the authority and do not render a building so inflexible as to hamper the activities of his successor.

Planning and decision making is done at local level.

Additional funds have not been made available for open plan schools but each new school receives a generous grant with which the Head Teacher can equip the school. A guidance brief on furniture and equipment prepared by the Advisers and the Long Term Planning Group is available for Head Teachers. Full support is given to Head Teachers and Staff by the Advisory Service and by the Administrative Staff of the Education Department.

Evaluation of one local project has been carried out by the Planning Group as a formal exercise. Informal assessment has been made of a number of local open plan schools by members of H.M.I., by Head Teachers and teachers from this and other local education authorities.

In 1971 the Department of Education and Science carried out a nationwide survey of open plan schools and published their observation in Education Survey 16 "Open Plan Primary Schools" (available from H.M.S.O.).

II CHANGE ANALYSIS

In considering the factors which could have a hindering influence on the success of open plan schools it is necessary to recognise three differing sets of circumstances which have common problems but which present varying degrees of difficulty.

1. The 'replacement' school - the situation where a new open plan school is built to replace an old building and where the staff and children are to be moved into the new environment.
2. The 'Remodelled' school - the situation where an old school is being remodelled to change it into an open plan school.
3. The new school in a new housing area.

The problems appeared initially to fall into three categories:-

(a) Head Teachers

(b) Assistant teachers

(c) Parents

1. The Head Teacher

The philosophy of the Head Teacher as the educational leader is all important. In an open-plan situation, however, the Head needs to review the differences made to his curricular role and to his relationship patterns. He needs to be a worker with individual teachers, a member of each year team and a positive leader in his function as co-ordinator of the teams and the staff as a whole. There is a diminishment of the Head's formal authority and hence a change in the style of leadership. The need for staff to become increasingly engaged in policy-making and policy revision becomes more apparent in this type of school.

2. Assistant Teachers

Assistant teachers need to realise that they will accept greater responsibility for planning, that long-term organisational strategy must be planned co-operatively and that the organisation must be made to suit the best interests of all teachers and all children. The emphasis in an open plan school is sharing - meum

and team have no place here - responsibility for all children, for equipment in a year base or in a resource centre, for continuous assessment of children's progress, for policy-making and curriculum changes are all shared activities.

3. Parents.

The school alone cannot implement the new approaches and innovations successfully unless it involves the parents. They must be aware of developments in education and must be encouraged to co-operate. This demands close liaison between school, parents and the local community.

'REPLACEMENT' SCHOOLS AND 'REMODELLED' SCHOOLS

In these schools the Head Teacher and staff know two or three years in advance that they will move into an open plan situation. In view of the fairly large turnover of staff, it is the Head Teacher who at this stage gives the change the most serious thought. The Head will be involved at all stages in the planning and design of the building. In consultation with Advisory staff, by attendance at D.E.S. and local courses, by visiting open plan schools in operation within the city and elsewhere he is able to begin to formulate ideas on the problems of organisation. Within a year of the opening of the new school he is in a position to begin the serious work of organising and training his staff who will by that time almost all be committed to the new school.

The staff training involves visits to other schools, attendance at courses, involvement in co-operative teaching experiments, weekly meetings either in or out of school hours to discuss primary education in general and open plan education in particular. Six months later the Head is in a position to select the year teams who will work together - this exercise is crucial to the success of the school. The teams must be compatible for there must be co-operative planning, constant collaboration, close unity, unrestrained communication and sincere sharing of thoughts and ideas. In addition the Head must try to ensure that the widest range of academic specialisms is available to the children in each year group.

There then follows a series of team meetings and full staff meetings to discuss organisation, methodology, balance and content of curriculum and practical matters such as style and quantity of furniture, equipment and its storage, circulation of children within the school.

At this stage the Head and staff are prepared with reasonable confidence to communicate their ideas and plans to the parents.

'NEW' SCHOOLS

The Head Teacher is not normally appointed more than one term before the new school opens. He will therefore not have been involved in the planning of the school building and hence will be able to effect only minor modifications. At the time he is planning, organising, ordering furniture, stock and equipment he has to carry on his normal duties in the school in which he is serving. He has no deputy or staff at this stage with whom he can consult. Obviously he receives maximum assistance from the Education Department staff but he has an exceedingly difficult task.

Staff are appointed bearing in mind the qualities needed for work in this type of school. Thus training begins virtually in the vacation before the school opens.

Parents are involved as soon as is practicable in a new school.

SECOND STAGE PROBLEMS

1. The full extent of the additional work load on teachers was not fully appreciated. The flexibility of the school which enables the forming and reforming of groups of children in varying numbers for specific purposes necessitates additional professional staff to cope with, in particular, creative craft education and withdrawal groups of gifted, remedial and retarded children.
2. The grouping of children and the responsibility children have for following their own programmes of work necessitates a greater duplication of materials than was anticipated.
3. Reprographic facilities are generally of a high standard but there is a need for more non-professional assistance to help with this work.

4. Insufficent attention was paid in the early years to designed storage for equipment which needs to be easily and readily accessible.

5. Inflationary building costs have resulted in reduced space being available and in inferior accoustics.

6. The speed with which a child resource area would develop necessitating the wide use of individual projectors, tape recorders visual material was not appreciated and such an area was not incorporated into the first open plan schools.

CURRENT SITUATION

FORCES FOR CHANGE	FORCES AGAINST CHANGE
1. The interest and enthusiasm particularly amongst young teachers.	1. Some teachers are averse to this type of school.
2. The general willingness of teachers and Head Teachers to experiment wisely in the best interests of children.	2. Some parents are sceptical about the benefits of this type of building.
3. The interest of architects in educational change.	3. Limitations of finance which can lead to a decrease in the total available space and to a lessening of 'specialist' spaces.
4. The enthusiasm of those teachers who are working in open plan schools.	4. Imposed staff limits - pupil-teacher ratio.
5. The freedom at local level to develop school buildings.	5. Despite day to day pressures and responsibilities the teachers must have time to clarify in their own minds what they are trying to achieve. There is a danger that methods may be followed which lack the support of a coherent belief and realistic aims and may therefore fail to achieve the quality of learning.
6. The improvements in teacher training in Colleges of Education.	
7. Freedom in in-service education to develop these ideas.	
8. The system allows for more efficient and effective use of staff and their abilities.	
9. Teachers being more involved in organisation become better professionals.	

CURRENT SITUATION cont...

FORCES FOR CHANGE

10. The possibility of planning schools for community use.

11. The facility with which people have access to people and to information.

III STRATEGY DESIGN

It is anticipated that this form of education will expand and develop in the future. One may assume that amongst the aims of education would be that of producing balanced and mature adults who can live in, contribute to and look critically at the society of which they are a part. One would agree that the citizen of the unpredictable future would need to be adaptable, capable of re-education, able and willing to work, have a sense of responsibility, be understanding and tolerant and possess powers of discrimination. The foundations need to be laid in the Primary School and the best preparation is to live fully as a child. Education is not a thing apart from living, it is part of life itself. Children need to be themselves, to live with other children and with adults, to learn from the environment, to enjoy the present, to prepare for the future, to create and to love and to learn to face adversity. School is not a teaching shop - it must transmit values and attitudes and the virtues of care, responsibility and perseverance. It must be a community in which children learn first to live as children and to have their physical, emotional, aesthetic and intellectual needs catered for.

There is a need for a scientific survey to assess whether or not open-plan education is achieving more for children and for teachers than was previously possible. A most useful survey could be carried out with the Polytechnic and/or the University into teachers' attitudes, the causes for satisfaction and dissatisfaction, the sources of opposition to open-plan, the general view of teachers who are not teaching in such schools etc.

A standard brief has been prepared as a result of the meetings of the Planning group. There are two main areas of conflict:-

(a) Do we build to maximum area standards with low building standards?
i.e Cheap finishes and services installations which may be costly to maintain.

(b) Do we build to a reasonable standard a minimum area?
i.e School may be short of space for essential purposes.

The Architect's approach has to be to evaluate priorities within the brief, build as many as costs will permit into design and explain why certain items have to be omitted. The local authority must approve the scheme, check that nothing essential has been omitted in the design and ultimately use the building. The local authority must prepare the brief and make the building derived from it work, the architect has to produce a building which meets the brief and cost limits.

The brief is constantly being changed as a result of feed-back and experience from buildings completed. The initial first and middle schools were a complete change from previous experience - i.e open planned environment for new age ranges. As a result of experience, there are certain problems which have yet to be resolved.

(a) Circulation generally which inevitably disturbs teaching groups. This is virtually insoluble within present cost limits.

(b) Position, character and size of the hall. Position has to be related to (i) Circulation from teaching spaces
(ii) Entrance
(iii) Community use

(c) Creative crafts (Home economics, woodwork, exploration of materials i.e clay, plastics, metals etc., needlework, modelling)

A large accessible space is needed. The problems here are:-

(i) This area needs hard floor and wall surfaces, a high degree of mechanical and electrical servicing.

(ii) Noise

(iii) Accessibility

(iv) Associated use of outside spaces(covered if possible)

(d) Resources Area containing Visual equipment, tapes, books, cassettes group viewers, charts.

The problems here are:-

(i) Accessibility

(ii) Storage

(iii) Noise from other areas

(iv) Light

(v) Electrical servicing

This is a relatively new problem in view of the dramatic recent increase in this kind of provision.

(e) Siting of specialist areas, resource areas and libraries for ease of access

(f) Flexibility of building

(g) Increased sound proofing and acoustics

(h) Increased creative craft and science areas

Further investigation is also necessary in these areas:-

(a) Increase in non-teaching staff

(b) The staff work load

(c) Extension of in-service education

(d) Increase in teaching staff to allow for planning, co-ordination and discussions on recording all-round progress of children in the most efficient and economical manner

(e) Records and record keeping

(f) Problems of organisation by teachers

(g) Implications for initial training -

Are colleges informed in sufficient detail so that they may best organise their programmes? A liaison officer between Local Authority and colleges could help considerably to overcome this problem

(h) Information on feedback to Head from staff